

Abstract 167

TITLE: Multicultural counseling and HIV/AIDS

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ISSUE: Counseling approaches with respect to HIV/AIDS are historically based on theories and techniques derived from working with white gay male clients. With the increasing presence of HIV/AIDS in the minority communities, counseling and therapeutic approaches must become culturally sensitive, and culturally appropriate in order to be effective components in the prevention and treatment process.

SETTING: HIV/AIDS therapeutic counseling, crises counseling, and case management, both clinical, agency or private therapy environment, primarily for minority clients and lower socioeconomic clients.

PROJECT: To address the issues of culturally sensitive and culturally appropriate counseling three areas of focus are encompassed. 1) The 3-step process of creating an effective cultural episode with each therapeutic relationship between the client and the counselor. 2) Understanding the generic counseling concepts and how they differ from the culturally specific counseling needs of today's client. 3) Developing appropriate communication skills and approaches for the multicultural clients, thereby opening the door for improved mental and emotional health assistance from the professional.

RESULTS: In 1997-1999, clientele consisting of African American men and women, white women, white gay men, Hispanic American men and Asian American women, After initial session, 75% of clients returned for future sessions. All reported having a higher trust and comfort level with respect to discussing HIV/AIDS and surrounding emotional issues. They also reported that they felt better understood. Clients became more open and interested in continuing therapy.

LESSONS LEARNED: Therapeutic and non-therapeutic experiences suggest that traditional counseling practices do not provide adequate cultural sensitivity or culturally appropriate knowledge, approaches or skills when working with the multicultural client. Without appropriate multicultural counseling and awareness for today's HIV/AIDS related population, counseling and case management can be ineffective, discouraging and perhaps even damaging to the mental health healing process. These findings suggest that due to the racial and ethnic makeup of the HIV/AIDS client, all counseling and/or guidance professionals must be properly trained in multicultural issues, approaches, and sensitivity. Without proper mental and emotional health of the minority HIV/AIDS population, education, information and prevention efforts are in jeopardy.

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